

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

Celebrating 45 Years

Melissa Johnson, OCSE



Forty-five years is an exciting milestone for the child support program. We've seen many changes over the years. For example, tribal child support programs now outnumber our states and territories. And it's no surprise that technology has caused a few changes:

- Paper checks have become outdated, with 71.7% of child support payments in FY 2019 received through electronic funds transfer.
- Communicating with customers has shifted from in-person to email, text, and chat.
- Checking the status of an intergovernmental case happens in seconds through QUICK instead of by mail or a phone call.
- No more wandering the office looking for a lost paper file as more programs use electronic case files.

But one thing has remained constant throughout these 45 years. The individuals serving the child support program are passionate about the work they do to support families.

In August, we celebrated Child Support Awareness Month. This year's celebrations looked a bit different. Instead of crowds gathering for backpack drives or community events, you'll read stories about how our program has adapted to the impacts of COVID-19 to continue serving families during the pandemic. States and tribes demonstrate their resilience as they shift their approaches to outreach and service delivery. I hope that these creative and critical solutions inspire you.

Also in this issue, we celebrate September's Grandparents Day and the start of Hispanic Heritage Month. We're also featuring you – our Unsung Heroes from across the country. You have not only dedicated a career to supporting child support parents but also demonstrated devotion to your families and compassion for your communities during the last few months.

Your tireless commitment to improving the lives of families and those around you makes this more than just a job. When I came to the child support program, I found a group of great people with a sincere passion for serving families. Thank you for the daily inspiration.

Melissa Johnson

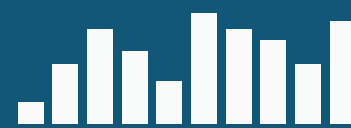
Director, OCSE Division of Regional Operations

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Census Report on Custodial Parents

The poverty rate for children who live apart from a parent is about three times that of children who live with both parents. Learn more in the [Census Bureau's latest report on custodial mothers and fathers](#).



Celebrating 45 Years of Child Support

The national program has served families for 45 years, encouraging responsible parenting, family self-sufficiency, and child well-being. Our partnerships with federal, state, tribal, and local agencies help ensure children receive support from both parents. [Watch this video](#) to learn how we're strengthening these partnerships.

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IN FOCUS

Hispanic Heritage Month Celebrations Adapt to COVID-19

California Department of Child Support Services,
Office of Communications and Public Affairs

Hispanic Heritage Month runs from September 15 to October 15. It's a major event in California, whose population of Spanish-speakers is the highest in the country by overall population. With the COVID-19 pandemic severely derailing 2020's plans, and only a sliver of normalcy with businesses reopening and schools back in "virtual" session, some child support offices in California are salvaging the year with creative outreach to this important sector.

Pandemic calls for different approach to outreach

Near the Mexican border, 85% of Imperial County's population speaks Spanish at home, so Hispanic Heritage Month happens year round. The Imperial County Department of Child Support Services team – 77% bilingual – participates in interviews on Spanish radio and television and runs comprehensive educational campaigns on child support program benefits with the local Spanish-language newspaper. Before COVID-19 struck, staff

conducted regular office hours at the Mexican Consulate in Calexico, spending four hours on scheduled Fridays offering in-person assistance to case participants living in Mexico. Staff also routinely crossed the border to work closely with Mexican federal officials in Mexicali. Now all such travel is suspended and restricted to telephone interviews and social media. Everyone hopes to resume normal operations soon.

To the west along the coast, San Diego County is far more urban than agricultural Imperial County. The San Diego County Department of Child Support Services has piloted many of California's innovations in community outreach during Hispanic Heritage Month and the rest of the year, including distributing digital flyers in English and Spanish to schools with large Spanish-speaking populations. By cross-referencing population, and geographic and economic statistics, San Diego County identified areas where flyers for

events and specific child support services would reach their desired audience, and tailored the language and imagery to address the needs of each community.

Like Imperial County, San Diego also broadcasts event schedules and information in Spanish and English on their Facebook page. They recently implemented two-way texting so customers can text questions to a general line or text their caseworker to ask about their specific case.

In California's wine country to the north, the Sonoma County Department of Child Support Services has built a strong relationship with its large and vibrant Hispanic community, including creating a team of caseworkers dedicated to the Spanish-speaking caseload. Every year, Sonoma County participates in Fiesta de Independencia, held during Hispanic Heritage Month, with an in-person presence to distribute informational materials and answer questions. In 2019, Sonoma County child support staff attended the "Dia de Los Cien 10 Year Anniversary" event celebrating Los Cien (the Hundred), Sonoma County's largest Latinx leadership organization. Last year, this large event brought private and public organizations together for festivities that included a buffet dinner with tamales, mariachi music, and wines from Hispanic vintners, creating networking and information-sharing opportunities. There will be no event in 2020.

With the COVID-19 pandemic leading to widespread business closures and the ensuing economic upheaval, communications and outreach have had to adapt accordingly. No matter what channel is used, California child support offices ensure the state's Hispanic population is included as much as possible in its outreach and communication efforts.



Child Support Outreach to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Tom Killmurray, OCSE

In a [September 2019 Child Support Report article](#), we learned about the substantial increase in the number of grandparents raising grandchildren, driven in part by substance use disorders. In 2017, the Census Bureau estimated 7.2 million grandparents lived with their grandchildren, up from 5.8 million reported in 2000.

The focus on grandparent-led families continues to receive attention from policymakers. The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act of 2018 created the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Advisory Council. Supported administratively by the Administration for Community Living within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the council has diverse federal, state, tribal, and local members. Its mission includes assessing service needs and gaps and identifying resources. The council has had its initial meeting and will submit a report to Congress.

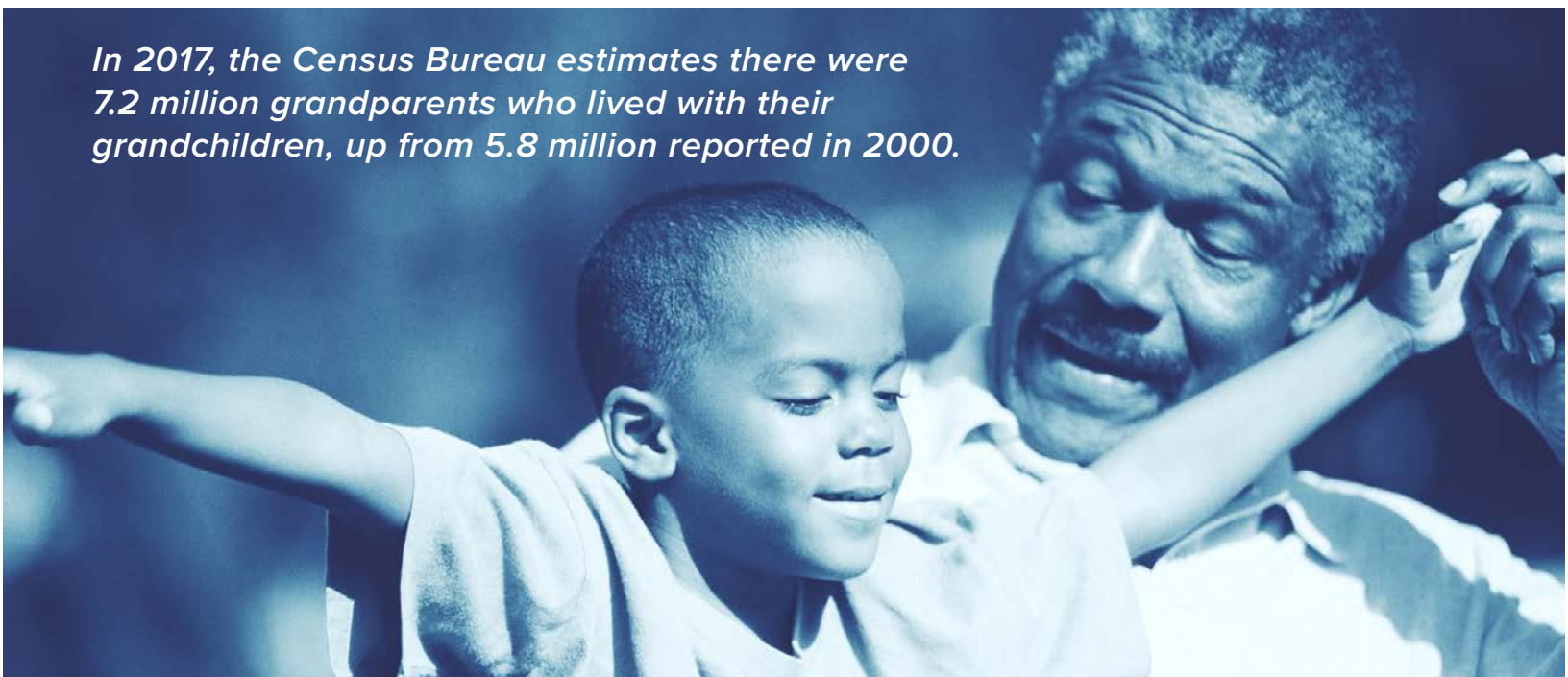
Supporting grandparent-led families

The Office of Child Support Enforcement, along with other federal human service programs, has been tasked with writing up a program profile describing how child support services can support grandparent-led families.

Following are some state, tribal, and federal practices that target these families, and the supports and resources they provide.

- Georgia: The state has a [website](#) directed at grandparents and waives the application fee for these families. The state's Kinship Care Portal also includes child support information for grandparents.
- Kansas, Illinois, Texas, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Delaware, and Oregon: These states have Human Services websites and brochures directed at relative caregivers, including child support information for grandparents.
- Missouri: The state proactively reaches out to "Grandfamily" organizations to offer in-person presentations covering the basics of child support. These organizations serve grandparents caring for their grandchildren and sometimes need information on child support services. If case-specific questions are asked, child support outreach staff follow up with the client and, if appropriate, may have the case transferred to the Outreach Unit.
- Rhode Island and Minnesota: Partnering with grandparent service organizations, these states developed special brochures with Frequently Asked Questions covering topics like change of payee, and explaining that grandparents are guardians with legal rights.
- Oneida Nation: In cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Families, the tribe identifies extended family who can care for the child, provides monitoring and a monthly Kinship Care payment, and refers the case to the child support office. Grandparents can request that the Oneida Family Court establish grandchild visitation rights.
- OCSE: Our website includes grandparents and other custodians in the Parents section. During 2018, our Access and Visitation grants to states served approximately 3,200 grandparents or other legal guardians.

In 2017, the Census Bureau estimates there were 7.2 million grandparents who lived with their grandchildren, up from 5.8 million reported in 2000.



DNA Testing With a Twist

Sandy Cloer, Child Support Director,
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

At the stroke of midnight on December 31, 2019, we celebrated the New Year 2020. I'm sure none of us imagined there would be a worldwide pandemic coming. COVID-19 has brought many challenges to our families and our businesses.

Like so many, we at the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) Tribal Child Support Program have had to think outside the box and devise ways to operate our program while protecting our employees and clients. Safety is our priority when we enter the door each morning and begin our workday.

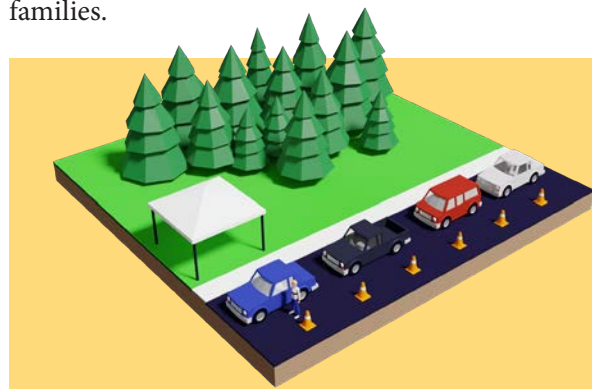
Drive-up testing

DNA testing for paternity was a challenge. How do we collect DNA safely when the public is restricted from entering the premises? EBCI Public Health closed lobbies in March 2020. So what's next? We set up a tent behind our office for drive-up testing. Clients could schedule a time to come to the test site, and upon arriving, the client would call and speak to their agent. We ask that clients wear a mask while in their vehicle. Agents also wear a mask, a face shield, and gloves for protection while taking temperatures of all persons in the vehicle and documenting contact information.

The agent reviews all information with the client and gives them a form to sign with a disposable pen. An agent takes the client's picture while they remain in the vehicle. Staff photocopy the client's identification card, while agents collect samples from those individuals in the vehicle. Once samples are packaged outside, the client signs the paperwork again and that concludes the process.

Staff help sanitize the outside area and all items used during the collection – the clipboard, camera, table, and copier. Agents are advised to clean their face shield and throw away any gloves they have worn.

While this may not be the most conventional way to do business, we've found this process works best for our families.



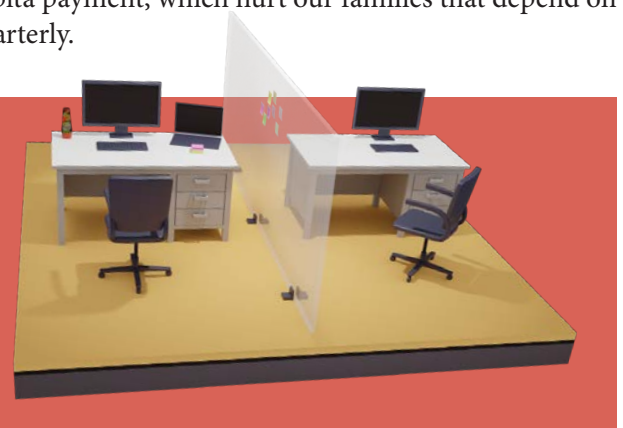
Tribe Makes Changes to Continue Serving During COVID

Kelly Hopkins, Child Support Director,
Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation

The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Child Support Services shutdown at the end of March, with limited services available to clients until June 1, 2020. The department continued to process income withholding orders and payments as they came into the office, including asking for unemployment benefits for noncustodial parents released from our tribal casino until it was to reopen. To keep families and staff safe, we have limited clients in the office. We make sure clients have an appointment, take temperatures at the door, and ask COVID-19 questions that the Kansas Department of Health and Environment provided for guidance as of June 1. The department has provided several hand-sanitizing stations throughout the area, and they sanitize public areas twice a day.

Our child support staff share offices, so we had to set up Plexiglass between desk spaces and purchase laptops to continue to work

Our child support staff share offices, so we had to set up Plexiglass between desk spaces and purchase laptops to continue to work in these ever-changing times of social distance and quarantine. With the rise of new COVID-19 cases in our community, we will be looking at teleworking two or three times a week. When in the office, we're not sharing space with co-workers. We continue to get new child support cases through mail, email, and by appointments. We have court hearings through Zoom or in person on special occasions. Department heads meet at least once a week to make sure all staff and client needs are being met. The program has maintained its IWO payments during this time with only a small decrease. With the tribal casino closed for about three months, we did not get a June Per Capita payment, which hurt our families that depend on this quarterly.



COORDINATION POINTS

VA Offers Support During COVID-19 for Those Facing Homelessness

Monica Diaz, Executive Director, Homeless Programs Office, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

During this unprecedented time, the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) offers a variety of resources to help veterans and their families exit homelessness or remain in stable housing. While these VA resources are important at all times, they are critical now. Knowing how COVID-19 spreads, it's extremely challenging for people experiencing homelessness to take the important precautions to protect themselves and others: washing your hands often with soap and water, avoiding close contact (6 feet) with others, covering your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces often.

In recognition of Child Support Awareness Month, we're highlighting four vital [VA homeless programs](#) that help prevent and end homelessness among veterans and their families.

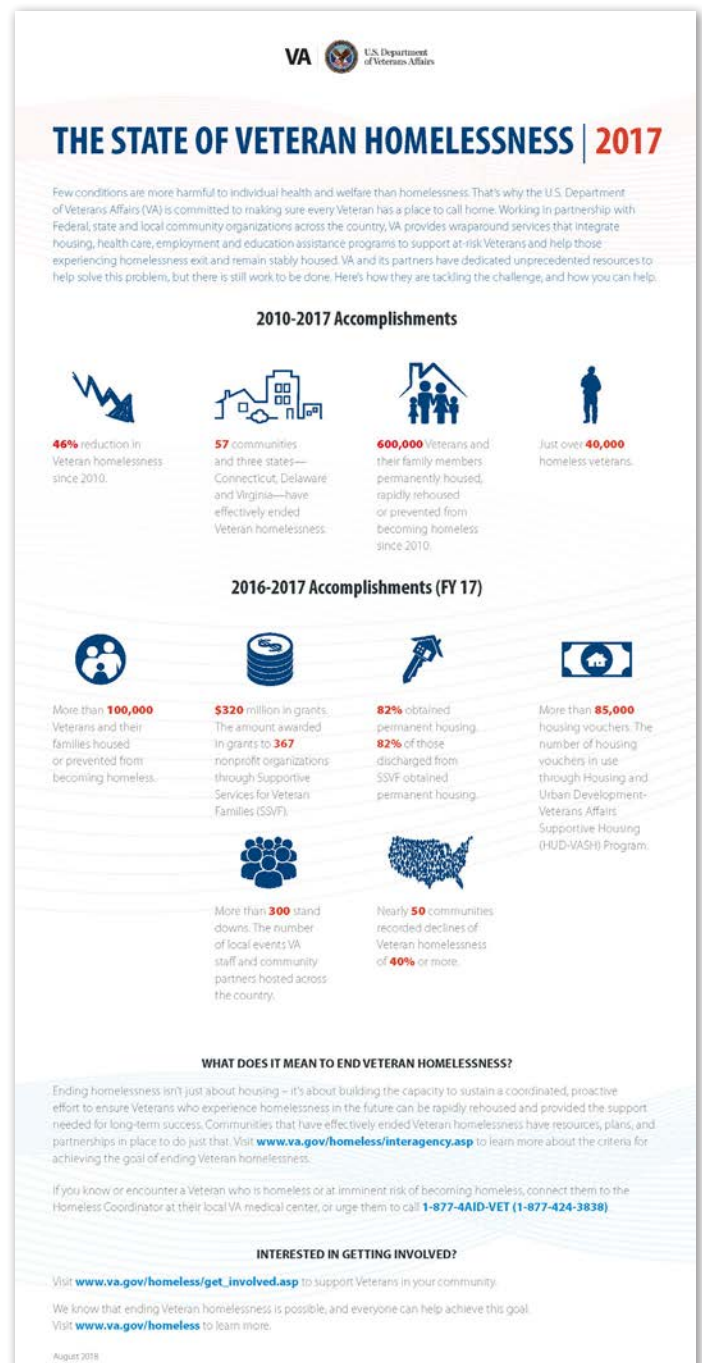
- [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\)](#) provides rapid rehousing and case management assistance to thousands of low-income veteran families. In 2019 alone, SSVF served 70,524 veterans and 20,608 children.
- [Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\)](#) is a collaborative program that combines HUD housing support with VA services to help veterans and their families find safe and stable housing. HUD provides rental assistance vouchers, while VA case managers connect these veterans with services such as health care, counseling, and mental health treatment.
- VA programs for [justice-involved veterans](#) promote access to VA benefits, including assisting with the apportionment of compensation to the spouses and children of incarcerated veterans.
- [VA's employment and training programs](#) help veterans exiting homelessness obtain and maintain employment.

In the next four editions of *Child Support Report*, we'll take an in-depth look at each of these programs, starting with SSVF and the child support resources it offers.

Did You Know?

The [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) has expanded resources to address the unique challenges faced by veterans and their families experiencing or at risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act allocated \$17.2 billion for the Veterans Health Administration, including \$700 million devoted to helping low-income veteran families.

Visit the [Veterans Experiencing Homelessness page](#) for more information on VA assistance for veterans and their families facing homelessness.



Pandemic Creates Unexpected Challenges for Auditors

Mona Ferrell, OCSE

The Office of Audit has offices nationwide, including our headquarters in Washington, D.C. Our small team of dedicated auditors audit every IV-D child support program to ensure that all 54 states and territories receive their fair share of over \$550 million in performance incentives. We protect the integrity of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary or his designee, the Office of Child Support Enforcement Commissioner, by ensuring that all of our products withstand appeals. Our streamlined, automated audit process to determine the completeness, reliability and security of the data, and accuracy of reporting systems, was vetted by outside sources and, so far, has not been overturned on appeal.

Our auditors and state contacts are accustomed to working together every year and know what to expect during an audit. Not so in 2020. When COVID-19 struck the country, all our audits came to a halt. Things changed overnight. State offices closed, employees worked from home, and accessing systems and data became nearly impossible. Our child support auditors worked relentlessly to maneuver through the audit process in spite of the unforeseen circumstances.

Whether it's through traditional methods, like in-person meetings and telephone calls, or through video conferencing and instant messaging, child support staff continue to work together to enhance performance and serve children and families. We're fortunate to have a dedicated team of auditors and state program staff willing to move the program forward in spite of obstacles brought on by the pandemic. We're sharing two auditors' recent experiences, but similar scenarios have played out across the country.

When the pandemic hit, we hadn't finished the audit. We were all teleworking, including the state workers. It was very difficult to get in touch with our state contacts, and even more difficult to obtain the information we needed to complete the audit because their offices were closed. However, thanks to the perseverance of both the auditors and state personnel, we developed alternate methods to obtain the data needed to complete the audit. It was a challenge, and without both parties working together, we would not have resolved these issues.

– Auditor conducting a Data Reliability Audit in Maryland

The pandemic hit near the start of this audit. The biggest challenge was obtaining remote access to Virginia's automated system to conduct the audit. Virginia's system help desk was inundated with calls because all their state staff were sent home during the pandemic. The federal audit staff were also working from home, and also needed the assistance of Virginia's system help desk to resolve their own issues at obtaining remote access to Virginia's automated child support system. However, despite these extreme difficulties, the federal auditors and state staff worked tirelessly together for several months and eventually resolved the issues and completed the audit under the most challenging circumstances.

– Auditor conducting a Data Reliability Audit in Virginia

Contact Tracing Slows the Spread of COVID-19

Answer the call! If you've been around someone with COVID-19, the health department may call to tell you that you've been exposed, and ask you to monitor your health and self-quarantine. They will **NOT** ask for money, your Social Security number, bank account information, salary information, or credit card numbers. Any information you share with the health department is confidential.

SPOTLIGHT – CHILD SUPPORT AWARENESS MONTH

President Bill Clinton proclaimed August 1995 as “National Child Support Awareness Month” in honor of the 20th anniversary of establishing the national child support program. Many states and tribes continue to recognize Child Support Awareness Month in August with events to highlight the importance of child support and celebrate families.

The challenge this year: How do you celebrate Child Support Awareness Month during a national pandemic? We heard from several programs that found creative ways to alter their awareness campaigns and celebrate through virtual events.

Idaho – Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall love to celebrate Child Support Awareness Month, and this year was no different. Although they were feeling the effects of COVID, they created a month-long virtual event celebrating children, families, and the child support program.

They kicked things off in the first week of August with a contest on their “Child First” Facebook page encouraging community members to post a picture or video highlighting family activities. The child support staff uploaded their own video highlighting socially distanced staff wearing masks while “One Love” by Bob Marley played in the background. They also hosted a Trivia contest with questions about the child support program and the Shoshone Bannock Tribes. Donated prizes encouraged family fun (aquatic center swim passes, movie passes, and gift cards). Child support staff ran an ad in the local paper, posted banners throughout the community, and created a display highlighting the child support program at the Indian Health Center.

To close out the month, the staff sponsored an engaging Facebook Tik Tok Video Challenge for tribal departments. The videos were judged on creativity and teamwork. The program staff donated prizes. The August activities encouraged laughter, learning, and safe fun for the community during this time of crisis.



TikTok Challenge winners from left to right: Alyssa Hood, Samantha Pretty Weasel, Samantha Neaman, Felician Fullmer.

Maryland – Carroll County

Every August, the Carroll County Child Support Office recognizes one employee to honor during Child Support Awareness Month. This year, Assistant Director Heather Velazquez decided that instead of highlighting just one staff member she would celebrate her entire child support team. Every staff member has been more creative, flexible, and better at communicating than ever before. While there have been several “hiccups” with the quick change to telework, the staff have successfully transitioned to working under this model and continue to keep our customer’s best interests in the forefront.

“Whether I engage them in conversation about ways to improve processing, or swiftly falling in line with daily changes, they are at the ready! I’m proud of how our team works together, and hope they recognize their impact in our community. Helping support children to grow toward a brighter future will continue to be our focus.”

“Kudos to the entire Carroll County Child Support team!”

*– Heather M. Velazquez, Assistant Director,
Child Support Office, Carroll County, Maryland*



The Carroll County, MD, child support team.

continued

Maryland – Worcester County



The Worcester County Child Support Office helped distribute the August lunch packs for Worcester GOLD, a program that provides meals to children each month during the summer.

Missouri – State Child Support Program

The Missouri Child Support Program celebrated Child Support Awareness Month by collaborating with the Missouri Family and Community Trust (FACT) to help families during the pandemic. FACT established a COVID-19 Relief Fund to get funds for 20 state agencies to help children and families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The child support program partnered with the Missouri Child Support Education Association on a virtual auction website to assist in family friendly fundraising efforts. The association requested support from businesses for product and service contributions, resulting in over 80 donated auction bundles. Over 112 local and international businesses donated items. The auction website was open to the public for the entire month of August and 105 participants placed bids. The auction raised \$6,716 to benefit the Missouri FACT COVID-19 Relief Fund.



Nevada – District Attorney Family Support Division



The District Attorney Family Support Division (DAFS) in Las Vegas celebrates with an annual outreach event in August. Hundreds of customers visit their lobby to address outstanding child support business and take advantage of special offers and services.

This year, due to COVID-19, DAFS wasn't able to invite the public to the facility. Since March, they've encouraged customers to handle their child support matters via phone or email. Still, some people prefer to take care of business in person. With the generosity of the DAFS team members, all customers passing through their lobby received gift bags filled with school supplies and personal hygiene products. It takes more than a pandemic to stop DAFS from celebrating Child Support Awareness Month.



continued

Oregon – Child Support Program



The Oregon Child Support Program recognized Child Support Awareness Month by developing a strategic marketing plan to promote the use of their new and improved online account.

The marketing plan includes visuals showing what's available to customers through their online account and an email and phone script for staff use. Their website has information about all the services available and directs participants to sign up for an online account. They also launched a mass email campaign, created frequently asked questions, and developed an online account user guide and program brochure.

“Our focus is on educating our customers about how much access they have to the program and how much they can do on their own through their online account,” commented Deputy Director Dawn Marquardt. “This is a newly improved online presence for Oregon and since we can't see our customers in person right now, we wanted to make sure they take advantage of this exciting new service.”

Pennsylvania – Butler County



The Pennsylvania Domestic Relations Section celebrated Child Support Awareness Month by hosting their first undergarment and pajama drive for children receiving services through Pennsylvania Children and Youth Services in Butler County.

Staff distributed 188 pairs of socks, 50 pairs of pajamas, 180 pairs of undergarments, and many diapers. They had clothing to fit boys and girls up to age 18.

The Butler County Domestic Relations and Children and Youth agencies have always had a collaborative relationship and put the needs of the children they serve first. Working together has helped each agency's workers better understand and appreciate the services that the other agency provides.

Butler County Domestic Relations staff organize and deliver clothes to their Children & Youth Services agency.



Unsung Child Support Heroes

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has brought our country disruption, uncertainty, and anxiety, it has also shown us heroes. Below are several child support heroes who have gone above their call of duty to help their community during this crisis.

Blanche Hescocock and Leah Jayne are case managers for the Klamath Tribes Child Support Enforcement Program. On March 20, 2020, the Klamath Tribes declared a national emergency along with the rest of the country because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs were not able to provide services, staff were placed on administrative leave, and the nation was unsure what would come next. Their child support program director met with Blanche and Leah to discuss the situation. They recognized the need to keep resources flowing to families that depend on it. Although the staff wasn't required to come into the office because of the pandemic, Blanche and Leah agreed to come in and process child support payments to make sure families continued to receive them. Blanche and Leah went beyond their normal job duties and put themselves at risk to come to work and process payments. They did whatever it took to get payments out to families without ever complaining. Blanche and Leah are examples of child support heroes. We can't thank them enough for their hard work and dedication to our families.

Blanche Hescocock



Leah Jayne



Logan Green is the financial specialist at the Suquamish Child Support Enforcement Office. Soon after the pandemic shut down operations, their child support program manager retired. The Suquamish program was down to two staff. They had to figure out how to process and distribute child support payments quickly while working remotely. Logan coordinated the purchase of all the equipment, and they were set up to operate remotely in a few days. In the midst of this pandemic, Logan managed to not only maintain seamless continuity of child support program operations, but also create an internal database to make payment processing more efficient and allow for electronic data storage and management. This database will make it possible to manage all the child support cases with ease. Logan is undoubtedly a HERO for all children receiving child support through the Suquamish Child Support Program.



Doris Dobson is an administrative specialist with the Talbot County child support office. Doris performs all fiscal responsibilities for child support. During COVID-19, she has been instrumental in providing financial support in a teleworking environment and has accepted additional responsibility for handling the Talbot County Food Resource Hotline. Doris answers calls at any hour from our most vulnerable population. She guides them to food resources in Talbot County and refers them to Family Investment as needed. She has used our "New Normal" to serve the community in a greater capacity. The Talbot County Department of Social Services Office of Child Support truly appreciates everything Doris does and her commitment of our customers. Maryland Child Support Administration joins them in congratulating Doris Dobson for her exemplary Gold Standard Customer Service in a new environment!



Do you know an unsung hero? Send us their story so we can share it in our next issue.

Early Childhood Collaborative

Kimberly Pope, OCSE

The mission for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is to foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership, and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services.

Led by ACF's [Office of Early Childhood Development](#), the Early Childhood Collaborative aims to carry out the ACF mission. Composed of representatives from each ACF program (including OCSE), this group works to enhance strategic connections between ACF offices and other federal agencies in the areas of education, early childhood development, workforce, and integrated services.

Program Representatives and Federal Partners

The collaborative shares valuable resources and actively identifies avenues for collaborating on special projects and initiatives with other federal agencies. They focus on supporting the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. A few key federal partners are:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- Health Resources and Services Administration
- National Institute of Mental Health
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Census Bureau
- U.S. Department of Education

As the collaborative works to enhance programming for individuals and families, watch for exciting new resources soon. For more information, contact Kimberly Pope at kimberly.pope@acf.hhs.gov.

Early Childhood Collaborative has a new webpage

To improve access to services through planning, reform, and integration, this group encourages information sharing. To learn about program services, see the [ACF Early Childhood Collaborative](#) webpage.

AUGUST is CHILD SUPPORT AWARENESS MONTH



Child Support Awareness Month

We celebrated Child Support Awareness in August, although the celebrations looked very different. One way to raise awareness is by sharing the video [“What is Child Support?”](#) with parents and partners. The 2-minute video highlights the top services the program offers. The video is short and general enough for any child support program to repurpose as theirs. Check it out; [it's also available in Spanish](#).

Child Support Report

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